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«PRIMO MAGGIO» IN THE UNITED STATES: AN INVENTED TRADITION OF THE ITALIAN ANARCHISTS *

May Day was, to use Eric Hobsbawm's term, an «invented tradition» [1]. Its historical origins, stemming from the eight-hour movement in the United States which culminated in the Haymarket tragedy, are too well known to bear repeating here. However, it was the rapidity with which May Day became in so many different countries the holiday of the workers with certain rituals, symbols, and rhetoric that give it the character of a social invention. Hobsbawm observed that such innovations were likely to occur during periods of accelerated change when inherited institutions and beliefs became obsolete, creating a need for new credos and social patterns.

Through repetitive and ritualized behavior which gave a semblance of continuity with the past, invented traditions supported group identity and solidarity, sanctioned institutions and their objectives, and inculcated appropriate values and behavioral models. For the socialist labor movements, May Day came to serve all of these functions [2].

The concept of invented traditions has heuristic value for the study of immigrant communities. Migrants coming from agrarian settings to industrializing societies experienced a particulary violent rupture with the past. The conservative response to such trauma on the part of peasants has been well established. Still, Old World cultures were often inadequate to their new situations [3]. And such traditional cultures had often been eroded by forces of modernization prior to

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emigration. As in Europe, workers in America were subject to hegemonic institutions which sought to reshape their identities and loyalties to conform to the requirements of capitalist economies and nation-states. Nationalism, economic liberalism, and secularism attempted to mould them into patriotic subjects and efficient laborers. Socialism, as an oppositional ideology, aspired to transform them into a class-conscious, revolutionary international proletariat. Each of these modern ideologies had its own invented traditions with which to enlist and sustain the enthusiastic commitment of its followers. An analysis of the competition of these contending faiths for the minds and souls of the immigrants would provide the political dimension which ethnic history in the United States has too often been lacking. The study of the history of May Day among various immigrant groups provides a promising approach for such an analysis. This essay seeks to apply the concept of invented traditions to the history of *Primo Maggio* among the Italian immigrants in the United States.

The Italian immigrants were preponderantly workers of the land, *contadini*, coming from the south of Italy, the *Mezzogiorno*. Their *paesi*, villages of origin, tended to be in the still-isolated areas of the interior, little touched by the Risorgimento, unification, and capitalist development which were transforming the rest of Italy. Illiterate, or semiliterate at best, excluded from political life, the mudsill of a feudal-like society, the contadini lived encapsulated in the little world of their paesi. Their *mentalità* was that of *campanilismo*, in which identity, solidarity, and meaning were defined within the traditions and relationships of their towns. Such was the social character of the majority of Italians who passed through Ellis Island to become laborers on the railroads and public works, in the factories and mines of America. Of course, there was a substantial minority of artisans and smaller contingent from the *piccola borghesia*, who became the *prominenti* (labor agents, bankers, professionals) of the «Little Italies». But from their ranks were also drawn the socialists and anarchists who brought their doctrines to America with them. A goodly number had participated in the social upheavals which rocked Italy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Among them were major figures of the Italian revolutionary movements who fled the recurring waves of repression [4].

Within the Italian colonies, *campanilismo* retained its cohesive

power, shaping residential and employment patterns and cultural and social life. The feast of the patron saint of the village was the most evocative celebration of the culture of the *paese*, while the mutual aid society, named after the saint or a famous *paesano*, was its most typical organizational expression. Given the multiplicity of groups of townspeople in any sizable Italian settlement, the number of religious feasts and societies proliferated, as one observer put it, «in a frightening fashion» [5]. In a perceptive analysis of these societies, Gustavo Tosti, the Italian consul in Boston, distinguished between the «campanilistica-religiosa» and the «militaresca e patriottica» [6]. Both kinds of societies were inspired and controlled by the prominenti as a means of facilitating their exploitation of the worker-members. While the religious-campanilistic societies had precedents in the confraternities of the *paese*, the military-patriotic societies were social inventions of the recently unified Kingdom of Italy. The prominenti, in order to enhance their standing with the Italian authorities, became the vocal exponents of a florid nationalism. In this they were abetted by the Catholic clergy, who sought in Italian patriotism an appeal to the religiously indifferent as well as a bulwark against the anticlericalism of the left [7].

Named after members of the royal family or Italian heroes, these patriotic societies sponsored a round of banquets, balls, picnics, and parades to celebrate the national holidays of *la festa dello Statuto* (Constitution Day) and *XX settembre* (the incorporation of Rome into the Kingdom). The colonial press kept by the prominenti published special issues on such anniversaries, extolling in turgid prose the virtues of the king and queen and the glories of Italy. The members of the societies, often common laborers, for these occasions donned elaborate uniforms of *carabinieri*, generals, and admirals, their chests adorned with medals. The *feste dei santi* and the national holidays (to which were added the American Fourth of July and Columbus Day) occupied so many days in the year that one critic referred to a «mania festaiola» (festival mania). These events, however, with their ceremonies and rhetoric, served to inculcate religious and political values among the immigrants and to reinforce the authority of the nationalist-clerical elite over the «Little Italies» [8].

For the self-styled «subversives», who were vehemently antinationalist, antimilitarist, and anticlerical, such religio-patriotic manifestations were anathema. It enraged them to see Italian workers carrying statues of saints through the streets of American cities, pin-

ning hard-earned dollars on their robes, or dressed as *bersaglieri*, marching behind a brass hand playing the Italian national anthem. Such behavior was proof of the superstitious ignorance of the *cafoni* (boors) which made them easy prey for the padroni and the priests. It further confirmed the radicals in their mission to enlighten the workers, to make them conscious of their class interests, and to inspire them with a vision of the future[9]. To bring their message to the immigrants, the revolutionaries utilized newspapers, pamphlet literature, songs, dramas, lectures, and holidays. They organized *circoli di studi sociali*, socialist clubs, and anarchist groups to supplant the religious and patriotic societies. They even created their own calendar, *Almanacco Sovversivo*, to replace that of the Church[10]. Rather than saints' days, the calendar noted anniversaries in the history of revolutionary movements, such as the fall of the Bastille, the Paris Commune, and the execution of King Humbert I, and figures such as Marx and Bakunin. In short, the Italian radicals created a counterculture of invented traditions with which to contest the nationalist-clerical hegemony over the immigrants. In this opppositional culture, Primo Maggio as both the holy day and the holiday of the workers came to embody the concentrated aspirations of the revolutionary socialist movements.

This study analyzes the articulation of the meaning of Primo Maggio by and among the Italian immigrants in the United States, particularly as it was expressed in the anarchist press. A close reading of the issues surrounding May 1st and of special numbers and *numeri unici* provided the substance for this analysis. Because the commemorative articles soon took on the character of ritual texts, there is a great deal of redundancy in the literature. As one reader commented, the articles on Primo Maggio had become monotonous and tiresome[11]. While the study identifies major themes running through these readings, as the first commentary of its kind[12], it also serves a bibliographical function which results in some repetitions in the presentation. Although the major figures of Italian anarchism were well represented, much of the writing is by ordinary workers. As «Arco» observed: «Each year with the approach of Primo Maggio inspiration seizes our comrades, all of whom seek with pen or word to make their contribution»[13].

The histories of Primo Maggio and the Italian anarchist movement in the United States began at approximately the same time. The *Gruppo Socialista-Anarchico-Rivoluzionario*, «Carlo Cafiero»formed

in New York City in 1885 and began publication of the shortlived *L'Anarchico* in 1888. Its second issue reported on a benefit ball for the widows of the Haymarket anarchists in which Italian comrades participated. *L'Anarchico* angrily denounced their execution as «judicial assassination», adding:

> Here, in the land of liberty, as ironically we hear repeated every day by the yankees, we see individuals condemned to death, guilty of having freely expressed their opinion... [14]

In Italy, as elsewhere, there were widespread protests against the hanging of the Chicago anarchists. November 11, the date of their execution, became yet another «bloody anniversary» in the revolutionaries' calendar, and their martyrdom became a central motif of the Primo Maggio observances [15].

In 1891, the May Day demonstrations culminated in a violent clash in Piazza S. Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome between soldiers and anarchists. That same year, Emma Goldman recalled, the small anarchist contingent which gathered at Union Square included several Italian comrades [16]. But Italian radicals in the United States were then few in number. During the 1890s, however, the harsh repression following the *Fasci Siciliani*, other uprisings, and several *attentats* forced many revolutionaries into exile. Some of them came to the United States; one of the earliest was Francesco Saverio Merlino, already an important figure in the anarchist movement. His collaboration on the publication of *Il Primo Maggio* (1891), a call for a general strike, brought down the wrath of the Italian authorities upon him. A brilliant speaker and writer, Merlino invigorated the Italian an archist forces in America, founding *Il Grido degli Oppressi*, organ of the *Gruppi Comunisti-Anarchici di N.Y. e dintorni*, in June 1892. Merlino carried on an active propaganda among the Italians along the East Coast and as far west as Chicago. Fluent in English, he spoke at cosmopolitan gatherings, and founded the journal *Solidarity*. Although no direct evidence has been found of his participation, surely Merlino and other Italian comrades were active in the early May Day rallies [17].

Nevertheless, the establishment of Primo Maggio as the *festa dei lavoratori* in America must be attributed to Piero Gori. Poet, playwright, lawyer, and labor organizer, Gori excelled at giving lyrical expression to the most elevated aspirations of anarchism. Gori was

deeply affected by the execution of the Haymarket anarchists, and May 1st was like a red thread running through his political and literary biography. Imprisoned for his part in the May Day demonstrations of 1890, Gori wrote a poem, «Primo Maggio», while in jail [18]. Compelled to flee Italy, after much wandering he came to the United States in 1895. In a whirlwind, coast-to-coast tour, Gori gave more than three hundred lectures in English and French as well as Italian, speaking in halls and saloons, at the entrances to factories and mines. A balladeer, he often sang his songs at such gatherings, accompanying himself on the guitar. Appropriately enough, he was in Chicago on November 11, 1895, and in Kansas City on May 1, 1896, where he spoke to a cosmopolitan audience of workers of various races and nationalities [19].

In Kansas City, Gori wrote the preface to his play, *Primo Maggio*, written years earlier but first published in 1896 [20]. At the urging of the anarchist dramatic group of Paterson, New Jersey, the play was first performed with Gori himself in the cast. From then on, he wrote in the preface:

> ... from Boston to Barre, from Barre to Chicago and so on to San Francisco, California, and vice-versa through the United States of the South — almost as if to symbolize my pilgrimage of propaganda in North America — the comrades of the various cities wished to see again on the stage the mysterious stranger who travels «toward the region from which the sun rises».

This one-act play became an indispensable feature of May Day celebrations in Italian colonies. Only more popular was Gori's poem, «Il Primo Maggio», sung to the strains of the chorus from Verdi's *Nabucco* which began «Vieni, o Maggio t'aspettan le genti...» (Come, oh May, the people await you...).

These verses, which speak of the «dolce Pasqua dei lavoratori» (sweet Easter of the workers), the glory of the sun, of winged hopes and the flowering ideal, are rich in both Christian and pagan symbols of springtime. Gori's engaging eloquence, sentimental idealism, and romantic imagery endeared him to a broad public and earned him the sobriquet «The gentle anarchist». His writings on Primo Maggio continued to be widely diffused in pamphlet form, his play performed, and his songs sung, long after Gori had departed these shores. Although Italian anarchism in the United States would boast more

forceful personalities, Gori more than anyone else left his genial impress upon the Primo Maggio of the Italian immigrants [21].

Gori organized the *Gruppo «Diritto all'Esistenza»* in Paterson and founded there the weekly *La Questione Sociale*, the first issue of which appeared July 15, 1895 [22]. Until suppressed by the federal government in 1908, this was the organ of organizational, i.e. Malatestian, anarchism in America. Its April 30, 1896 issue printed, alongside Gori's poem, an article which sounded the theme of declension. With few exceptions, this was to be the dominant note of anarchist writing about Primo Maggio in the decades ahead. The writer bemoaned the degeneration of May Day. The «bloody anniversary» had become simply a day of merrymaking and leisure. For this, he blamed the socialist politicians who, fearing the militancy of the workers, had cooled their revolutionary fervor with counsels of calm and patience. The following year, the editorialist again lamented that Primo Maggio, which had once given the proletariat a sense of the power of international solidarity, was now a «festa del lavoro». He pointed out that unlike Labor Day in the United States, which had been designated a holiday by the authorities, Primo Maggio had been placed on the calendar by the workers themselves [23]. One of the functions Primo Maggio served from the very beginning was as a polemical club with which the anarchists bashed the parliamentary socialists and bourgeois reformers for emasculating the proletariat with their preaching of legality, nonviolence, and the ballot. The Primo Maggio homily of the anarchists early assumed the tripartite form from which it was seldom to depart: 1) an evocation of the day's heroic origins in the blood of revolutionary martyrs; 2) a lament for its decline because of the cowardly self-seeking socialists and bourgeoisie; and 3) an invocation to restore the day to its «primitive significance» by instilling the workers with revolutionary ardor.

In 1898, *La Pasqua dei Lavoratori*, the first *numero unico* devoted to Primo Maggio in the United States, was published by the «socialisti-anarchici» of New York City. Although they had previously issued a XX settembre number to protest the «colonial bacchanalia», the socialist-anarchists decided on a Primo Maggio publication to remind the *patriottoni* (big patriots) «that we are still alive and better organized to smash all that is dishonest in this colony». In a message to the Italians of New York, Virgilio Grazzini wrote:

> In this land of the God Dollar, you Prominenti have been propped up by the prostitute journalists and by the

> numerous cafoni who, not able to see beyond their braided uniforms and church banners, applaud and sing hosannas, proclaiming you as the saviors of the Italians in America [24].

This publication was intended to open the eyes of the blind to the nefarious dealings of the bankers and bloodsuckers who swindled the workers.

Various themes of Primo Maggio are articulated in *La Pasqua dei Lavoratori*. The title itself was chosen, asserted Michele Robertucci, because, while the workers ridiculed the Easter of the Church, Primo Maggio signified the resurrection of the workers from the slavery of capitalism. To hasten the approaching cataclysm, he urged the anarchists to make the workers aware of the power of international brotherhood and the general strike. Grazzini's « La primavera dell'umanesimo » extolled the joys of spring, the season of flowers, contrasting these with the fierce struggle between the workers and capitalists in Italy. Altough Primo Maggio had lost its primitive character, the workers should abstain from work in a display of solidarity. Taking issue with the individualist anarchists, G. Filippone argued that the workers must organize in order to oppose their formidable adversaries. While the individual act of revolt was a noble sacrifice, without organization strikes would be defeated by the combined forces of capitalists and government. But Filippone hastened to add that he was not recommending political parties or formal societies, but rather groups based on common ideals and bonds of fraternity.

Paterson, New Jersey, by the late nineties a center of Italian anarchism and home of *La Questione Sociale*, became notorious in 1900 when Gaetano Bresci, a silkworker, returned to Italy and shot King Humbert I [25]. During these turbulent years, *La Questione Sociale* had a series of distinguished editors, including Enrico Malatesta himself, but none was more provocative than Giuseppe Ciancabilla [26]. Expelled from several European countries, he arrived in the United States in 1898. An exponent of an extreme antiorganizational anarchism, he possessed an uncompromising, contentious, acerbic temperament. The 1899 May Day issue of *La Questione Sociale* edited by Ciancabilla was devoted entirely to the Italian system of *domicilio coatto*, confinement of political prisoners to penal islands [27]. Midwifed by socialist politicians, Primo Maggio was from

the beginning a conventional holiday in which the workers soon lost interest, Ciancabilla wrote. He declared. «We do not believe any longer, as we once deluded ourselves, in the social and ideal significance of this recurrence». He therefore dedicated these «sorrowful pages» to remembering «our confined comrades» and to the propaganda of vendetta and revolution. The task of the anarchists was to nourish in the hearts of the working masses hatred for their oppressors. When the masses awakened, that day would be the true Primo Maggio: «the brilliant feast of springtime, the feast of the good and splendid sun of the future... rising from the vivid sunrise of anarchy».

Ciancabilla's increasingly acrimonious polemics with the Malatestians resulted in a break with *La Questione Sociale*. Ciancabilla continued his tempestuous career, publishing successively *L'Aurora* and *La Protesta Umana*. Spring Valley, Illinois, which had a strong anarchist contingent of Italian and French coal miners, provided a home for Ciancabilla for a time. In the 1901 Primo Maggio issue of *L'Aurora*, «Libero» admitted cursing the cowardice and brutalized conscience of the working masses, but now he was convinced that «the idea» had won: «a new conscience was forming called Solidarity, a new *patria* called Brotherhood, and a new society called Libertarian Socialism» [28]. Another article recalled the «baptism of blood» of Haymarket which had led to the establishment of Primo Maggio, and its subsequent perversion by «authoritarian socialists». In America, where the development of a libertarian conscience among the proletariat was retarded, only the anarchists kept alive the prophetic significance of the date. Ridiculing the goal of an eight-hour day, Ciancabilla listed the objectives of anarchy: abolition of private property; common ownership of all social wealth; dissolution of government, clergy, military, courts, nobility, and bureaucracy. Through a natural process of evolution, the class struggle was developing beyond national frontiers. Primo Maggio symbolized this development toward international solidarity of the working class. Even though the date was celebrated as a holiday, Ciancabilla encouraged the «gymnastics of resistence» of labor conflicts which prepared the workers for the general strike, «when in the mild sun of May, the festa del lavoro will be transformed into a day of battle and victory» [29].

A proponent of the propaganda of the deed, Ciancabilla not only extolled the assassination of Humbert by Bresci, but also that of President McKinley by Leon Czolgosz, as «the most vigorous and elevated manifestations of the spirit of anarchist rebellion» [30]. Driven from

Spring Valley by mob violence, he quickly resumed publication with *La Protesta Umana*, first in Chicago, then in San Francisco. The April 30, 1903 issue featured a poem, «Primo Maggio», by Corrado Corradino, which described the suffering of the proletariat, but held out the hope of *Fulgido Maggio dei Lavoratori* (Dazzling May of the Workers). *I Fatti del Maggio 1898*, a vivid account of the shooting of demonstrators in Milan, was serialized, with the comment that to overcome the lethargy of the Italian people it would be well «to plunge once more into the bath of bloody memories». Ciancabilla's anticipations of the impending apocalypse was not fulfilled, and he expressed disgust with the profanation of Primo Maggio. In Europe and America it was celebrated by emptying glasses of wine and mugs of beer, raucous singing of revolutionary songs, and soporific speeches, which caused the bourgeoisie to laugh with derision [31].

Ciancabilla shared Gori's fascination with the potency of Primo Maggio. A collection of his writings published in 1900 bore the title *Fiori di Maggio* [32]. His poem, «Primo Maggio», however, had an agonistic, austere character. It began:

> There runs in our veins too much watered blood / of languid words which have intoxicated us too much: / the sickening sweet rhetoric of love and brotherhood, / has penetrated into our soul with lying hope. / Our dead, in the meantime, from atrocious gallows / hang, unavenged, and ferocious massacres, / vendettas, tortures, and bloody insults / which slap our faces go unpunished and unavenged.

and concluded:

> O shining Primo Maggio, may your day come, / come the supreme hour invoked by the oppressed, / the hour of justice, of the great victory / when from the vivid blood sprouts the new history /to cancel the infamy and the shame of servitude... / That alone will be our Primo Maggio! [33]

Following his death after a long illness at age 32 on September 16, 1904, a brief biography of Ciancabilla was published entitled *Primo Maggio* [34]. If Gori was anarchism's poet of love, flowers, and fraternity, Ciancabilla was its poet of hatred, blood, and vendetta.

Among the early editors of *La Questione Sociale*, Luigi Galleani,

a seasoned agitator, had escaped from confinement on the island of Pantelleria and made his way to Paterson in 1901 [35]. Because of his conspicuous role in a violent silkworkers' strike the following year, he again became a fugitive, surfacing in Barre, Vermont (another anarchist stronghold), where he founded *Cronaca Sovversiva*. Until his deportation in 1919, Galleani was the dominant personality among the antiorganizational anarchists. An exponent of communistic anarchism, he defined the society to come as one in which the only bond among individuals was that of solidarity, in which all means of production and exchange were held in common, in which all forms of authority and coercion were eliminated. Like Ciancabilla, Galleani upheld the value of the individual act, but exalted the general strike as the culminating event in the social revolution. Opposed to all forms of organization, including political parties and labor unions, he believed in direct action by *gruppi di avanguardia* who would set the example for and inspire the masses. Galleani effused passionate rhetoric and ferocious polemics in a baroque style.

In his commentaries on Primo Maggio, Galleani drew heavily upon the scriptures, sacraments, and liturgy of Christianity [36]. Its glorious origins were baptized in torrents of blood, christened by persecutions, and surrounded by martyrs. The blood of Lincoln became the *ostia sacra* (sacred host) of human liberty, the anarchist cause an apostolate, the defection of the cowardly the betrayal of Judas, and the path of human redemption likened to Calvary: «Along the slope of Golgotha hope will fall again under the immense weight of the cross... but the crucifixion of the masses will be suceeded by the holy Easter of the revolution and the resurrection».

Galleani sounded the theme of declension again and again in *Cronaca*. Primo Maggio had become just a holiday on the orthodox socialist calendar with parades and baccanalia; it had been purified, castrated, and circumcized by the fakirs of socialism. The movement for an eight hour day in France in 1906 heartened Galleani, not because the end was of any significance, but because the call for a general strike was itself revolutionary. The failure of the insurrection to materialize brought renewed disappointment. Primo Maggio had been reduced «to a farce unworthy of men who aspire to their own emancipation» [37]. The 1911 May Day issue, along with Gori's «Inno di Maggio», carried an article by «Liane» which declared Primo Maggio to be a cadaver. Elena Purgatorio of Frontenac, Kansas, in «La Primavera», hailed the sweet season of flowers which many could

not enjoy because of their misery. Yet she declared, the utopia of today could become the reality of tomorrow, if the people aspired to it. Writing from Gallatin, Pennsylvania, Giuseppe Parenti ridiculed the folly of designating a precise date on which the proletariat was to rise against its rulers. Why should workers and especially subversives abstain from work on May I? He asked. Was it not a contradiction for revolutionaries who had a horror of all that was old and conventional to extoll their «glorious traditions»? Primo Maggio, Parenti proclaimed, should not be devoted to songs and red carnations, but to the cry of war. What was needed were strong men who did not get drunk on the poetic ambrosia of a Primo Maggio of flowers and love [38].

The wave of mass strikes in 1912 and 1913 revived Galleani's hope in the imminent social revolution. *Cronaca* on its front page of May 3, 1913 carried the painting by Giuseppe Pelliza da Volpredo, *Quarto Stato*, which depicted a mass of workers advancing toward the future. An accompanying article reviewed the origins of Primo Maggio and enumerated the atrocities and massacres suffered by the workers, including the recent killings of Modestino Valentino and Emilio Bacciocchi. The social war was spreading throughout the world, Galleani asserted, and to the white terror of reaction the workers must respond with the red terror of armed insurrection. They should be ready to use arms, because it was better to die face to face with the enemy than slowly from a life of privation [39]. A special issue of *Cronanca* in 1914 featured Galleani's «Primo Maggio! Ieri, Oggi, Domani» (Primo Maggio! Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow), a fiery call to arms. Primo Maggio had inspired hope among the oppressed and fear among their oppressors, but the ingenious workers had been deceived and May 1 had become a day of rest and merrymaking sanctioned by the ruling class. Meanwhile, the blood of fratricide flowed from Puglia to Colorado, where the janizaries of the «great horrible republic» suffocated the sparks of revolt which had spread from mining camp to mining camp. «Rassegnarsi o insorgere» (Resign ourselves or rebel!). The choice, avowed Galleani, was either to resign ourselves to the shame of slavery, exploitation, silence, or to rebel with all the arms at our disposal. He challenged the comrades to unleash the levelling cyclones which would transform the festive May of today into the flaming dawn of the Primo Maggio of tomorrow [40].

There were relatively few adherents of the purely individualistic strain of Italian anarchism in the United States, but its leading ad-

vocate, Libero Tancredi, stirred up a storm of controversy during his several years here [41]. Espousing the Nietzschean and Stirnerian idea of the superman, Tancredi rejected all forms of collective action or solidarity, believing only in the efficacy of the single ego (*Io!*). His attitude toward Primo Maggio may be ascertained from an article, *La data vergognosa* [42]. (The shameful date), which appeared in his journal, *Novatore*. In venomous language, he denounced Primo Maggio and its celebrants as «the democratic sham par excellence». The proletariat now had its own holiday which was celebrated by all, prostitutes, bankers, bourgeosie, police, even workers, who embraced, danced, and sang, surrounded by flowers, sun, spring, nature, animals, god, devil, Mazzini, San Romolo Murri, Marx. «Acrimos» (Tancredi) expressed his utter contempt for this saturnalia: «I spit on your proletariat, your bourgeoisie, your priests, your monarchies, your socialists. A great, horrible, poisonous spit, full of the disgust which drowns my soul». He was not of a crowd, nor of the proletarian class, nor the bourgeois class; «I am a man», asserted Acrimos, «one single man who is worth more than the collectivity of miserable beings such as you». Despite his programmatic vacuity and rhetorical excess, Tancredi did attract a modest following among the Italian immigrants.

Curiously, this issue of *Novatore* also carried the poem, «Primo Maggio», by Arturo Giovannitti, the syndicalist poet and labor organizer. In these verses, Giovannitti expressed disillusionment with the reality as opposed to the ideal of May Day:

> Tomorrow, I will not be there. I used to go / when the mob and the rabble wild and fearless defied / the handcuffs and the machine guns. / But tomorrow, there will be barrels / of wine, roast chickens, fruits, cream / a thousand imbeciles and four speeches / by an illustrious orator of the extreme. / ... For this reason I will not come / this time / I will get dead-drunk by myself at the tavern / without being a hero. / For seven years at the last of April / I kissed my children on their pale foreheads, / I took down from the nail my gun, / left the ax there, behind the door. / At the first light of dawn I ran to all the meetings in the city / to return in the evening drunk / for equality and liberty [43].

Following the departure of Ciancabilla, *La Questione Sociale* resumed its character as the *portavoce* of the organizational anarchists.

Its Primo Maggio issue of 1900 was edited by the *Circolo Socialista Anarchico Rivoluzionario* of New York which had a thousand extra copies printed. *Gli anarchici — Il 1° Maggio* expounded the by now familiar thesis that the anarchists had given to the day its revolutionary character while the parliamentary socialists had made of it «la festa del lavoro». Several writers called for revolutionary agitation in preparation for the general strike. The theme of declensions was reiterated in 1901; Primo Maggio had been reduced to nothing; «The bourgeoisie no longer have anything to fear; the workers no longer have reason to hope». An article entitled, *Gli anarchici e le unioni di mestiere* advocated, contrary to the antiorganizational position, that comrades should join unions and see, to give them a revolutionary character. A manifesto issued by the Barre anarchists saluted May and «the delicate perfume of its flowers», but lamented that Primo Maggio had become an official holiday of the social democrats just as *lo Statuto* was of the bourgeoisie and Easter of the Catholics. Once there were imposing meetings, now only small gatherings which exhausted themselves in noisy and partisan toasts. Still, the manifesto charged the comrades: «Let us abstain from work and demonstrate our solidarity with the exploited of the world» [44].

As noted, the literature of Primo Maggio is rich with Christian allusions, but the most unabashed use of religious imagery must be the 1902 essay of A. Cavanna of Barre [45]. He wrote of the religion of memories; of the redemption of the workers; of the first communion of the faith; of the consecration of Primo Maggio; of the bloody flowering of the sacrifices which mature in the supreme victory of the faith; of the souls of workers rising to the conception of emancipation; of driving from the temple the merchants of idle chatter. While Cavanna's antecedents are not known, more than one Italian radical had been a youthful student in seminary.

A *Questione Sociale* article entitled «Il Primo Maggio e lo Sciopero Generale» in 1903 declared that the inspiration for May Day was not the eight-hour day, but the realization on the part of workers throughout the world that they could act together to secure their rights to life, liberty and well-being. Although thanks to the socialists and bourgeois intellectuals Primo Maggio had degenerated, yet the idea of the international solidarity of the working class and of the general strike remained as potent today as it was in 1890. A special May Day issue of *La Questione Sociale* of 1904 featured an illustration of «The precursors of Primo Maggio», with the portraits of the Haymarket

anarchists. An accompanying article voiced the standard complaint. Transported from the economic to the political terrain, Primo Maggio had lost its combativeness and become the *festa dei fiori*. Leonardo Centonze's «La Crisi del Primo Maggio», recited the critique of reform socialists: «Where the spirit of revolution prevailed, they made an arid desert and they called the desert: Socialism». Centonze maintained that the proletariat must determine its own fate and not follow so-called intellectuals. This position was endorsed by Pedro Esteve, a Spanish anarchist and sometime editor of *La Questione Sociale*, who affirmed that the emancipation of the workers must be accomplished by the workers themeselves [46].

The French General Confederation of Labor's call for a general strike for the eight-hour day in 1905 inspired *La Questione Sociale* as it did *Cronaca*. «No more laments, no more feste, no more vain memories. Let us turn our gaze serenely toward the future and no longer toward the past... Rise, oh May!» Yet the passivity of the workers in Italy, where the day was spent in merrimaking, was noted with regret. Not harmonious song or eloquent toasts, but loaded guns would secure liberty for the people. As May Day 1906 approached, Ciccarellu of Rome, New York, predicated that blood would run in the streets, «but from the blood-soaked earth will spring flowers of progress and civilization». In an exhortation to the workers, he declaimed: «The flaming flag of vindication, kissed by the golden rays of the sun, waves — and a voice cries, "rise, oh slaves!"». But blood did not run in the streets; it was a tranquil day. «Titi» described sardonically the workers who, «faithful to tradition», had abandoned work, dressed in holiday finery, marched in good order, sung «Vieni o Maggio», danced, and raised toasts, demonstrating to the *padroni* their rebellious civility. But, he commented sourly, they had sung and danced on the still-warm corpses of the victims of capitalism, and urged the comrades to prepare so that next Primo Maggio did not find them between a beer and a dance but at their battle stations. Yet when May 1st rolled round again, Augusto De Angelis complained that the day had been one of platonic manifestations [47].

In March 1908 *La Questione Sociale* was suppressed by direct order of President Theodore Roosevelt for propagating «anarchist crimes» [48]. However, in June the anarchists resumed publication with a new masthead, *L'Era Nuova*, under the editorship of Ludovico Caminita. Its 1909 Primo Maggio issue reflected on the enthusiasms and hopes of the early years. Now, deprived of its «primitive

significance», May Day was no different from a thousand other holidays. Yet the writer took heart in the revolutionary labor movements in Europe and America, urging anarchists to lend all of their energies to these unions. Yet in the following issue, Primo Maggio was denounced as a proletarian disgrace, observed peacefully almost everywhere; where violence did occur the workers got the worst of it. Similar sentiments were expressed in 1910. The battles of the past for justice and equality were recalled with nostalgia, but for the «new generation of workers» the day had no special meaning. Writing from Frontenac, Kansas, Valerio Brunetti decried the celebration of the blood of the martyrs of Chicago with drunken orgies. Why celebrate the first of May? For him, Primo Maggio could be any day as long as it was the Primo Maggio of the Social Revolution. These views were echoed by Luigi Mauro of Rochester, New York: While the workers were led like sheep by the socialists, the Haymarket martyrs were commemorated with barrels of wine and beer. Yet Mauro affirmed that the social revolution was inevitable. From Spring Valley, Joe Corna wrote: Primo Maggio, like Labor Day, had become a day of idle chatter, parades, and drunken brawls. Why remember any longer the «Martyrs of Chicago»? Significantly, *L'Era Nuova* passed over May Day 1911 and 1912 in silence [49].

The flagging spirits of the anarchists, however, were revived by the mass strike of 25,000 silkworkers in 1913. *L'Era Nuova* reported with satisfaction that the Paterson workers had recovered the true meaning of Primo Maggio with a general strike for the eight-hour day. A monster procession of thousands marched through the principal streets of the city behind red flags. Each marcher had a red ribbon with the letters IWW on his lapel. The young women were dressed in red from the tip of their shoes to the ribbons in their hair, while four girls in white with red sashes around their waists carried an IWW banner. The bands played the «Internationale», the «Marseillaise», and the «Inno dei Lavoratori». «On this day», the report concluded, «the proletariat of Paterson raised the banner for which twenty-six years ago five of our comrades in Chicago were assassinated by the Republican Bourgeoisie» [50].

Yet in 1914, «Souvarine» posed the question once again: «Pasqua dei lavoratori; pasqua di sangue o pasqua di... sbornie?!» (Easter of the workers; Easter of blood or of... drunken orgies?!). Declaring himself a Bakuninist of the old school, who believed in the insurrection of individuals or small groups, Souvarine declared his opposi-

tion to both the noisy festival and the notion of a rebellion on a fixed date. Primo Maggio should be a day of preparation for the revolution, «a day of propaganda so that tomorrow, resuming his daily slavery, the worker does not return with an upset stomach and broken limbs, but with a little more consciousness of his destiny, with a little more faith in himself and his comrades of the chain» [51].

During the years preceding World War I, a wave of syndicalism swept the Italian workers in the United States. In part an extension of the syndicalist movement in Italy, in part a response to the Industrial Workers of the World, the appeal of syndicalism was based in the reality of the working lives of the immigrants. Excluded from the A.F. of L. trade unions, excluded from American politics, part of the common labor force in the mass production industries, the immigrants found in the principles of syndicalism the promise of conquering and transcending those institutions which kept them in a debased status [52].

Carlo Tresca was the leading exemplar of the anarcho-syndicalist as journalist, orator, and organizer [53]. Following his arrival in the United States in 1904, and after serving for a brief time as editor of *Il Proletario*, Tresca embarked upon a career of independent journalism under the mastheads successively of *La Plebe*, *L'Avvenire*, and *Il Martello*. In the Primo Maggio issue of *La Plebe* of 1908, he observed that the May of redemption was still a long way off, since the workers lacked rage in their hearts. Still, he urged them to make it a day of strikes and protests and not simply of noisy demonstrations. Articles by Ottorino Ronchi («La Settimana Sanguinosa: Maggio 1871», on the Paris Commune) and Edmondo De Amicis («Il Primo Maggio Ideale») and poetry by Mario Rapisardi («Vieni o sole dell'avvenire») and Corrado Corradino («Maggio Santo») filled out the issue [54]. In *L'Avvenire* of 1910, Tresca repeated his admonition to the workers not to celebrate, but to prepare themselves for the struggle. Equality would not come of itself, or from the compassion of the wealthy, but had to be conquered by the workers themselves. He urged them to form unions and to discover their hidden strength. As a counterpoint, Giovanni Tecchio's poem, «Primo Maggio», celebrated the coming of spring with its flowers and green, as presaging the awakening of the people [55].

Among other syndicalist journals, *La Propaganda*, the organ of the Italian socialist sections of the Northwest, featured in its May Day issue of 1908 an article by Olga Basile-Alberti, *I Maggio: un appello*

alle Donne. In sentimental language, she appealed to women as mothers, wives, and daughters to take their places beside their men in the struggle for human redemption. «Al sole dell'avvenire» by Vittoria Licci saluted the sun of the future, contrasting the misery of the workers today with the May to come with its smiling villages and white cottages, without columns of factory smoke obscuring the sun.

«L'Economista» declared that the primary task was to awaken the minds and consciences of the Italian workers in America to the exploitation to which they were subjected every day. Humble and resigned, they suffered privation in silence, lacking the courage to rebel. Although everyone declared himself a socialist because it was fashionable to do so, «Lucifer» observed, a call to descend into the piazza would result in general flight. The many awaited the miracle of the social revolution without realizing that their emancipation depended upon themselves [56].

La Lotta of New York City, in a special Primo Maggio edition of 1909, deplored the abandonment of the Marxist doctrine of the class struggle for humanitarian idealism, but asserted that syndicalism would rescue the working class from this evangelical utopianism. For the syndicalist, Primo Maggio was an experiment in the general strike which would be the final and decisive battle of the proletariat. Among other articles was «Memento Maggio 1898-Maggio1909» which recalled the bloody days of Milan with pictures of the «carnefici» (murderers) and the names of those killed. Of particular note in the essay by L.M. Bettazzi, who sarcastically attacked the «sermoni cristianeggianti» (Christian-leaning sermons) which applied the analogy of Easter to Primo Maggio. Such parallels between the socialist society of the future and the Christianity of the past were wrongheaded, he argued, since the former would make available the good things of life to all, while the latter was a religion of renunciation. He criticized those whose writings were like a rosary in which the name of Marx had been substituted for that of Jesus. V. De Milita agreed with the criticism of the use of Christian concepts in socialist propaganda. It was a disgrace that Primo Maggio was called «la Pasqua dei lavoratori». De Milita warned that if the workers followed «leaders» they would merely be replacing the Easter of the church and black priests with that of Socialism and red priests [57].

In Philadelphia, a militant group of anarcho- syndicalists established *La Comune*, «Organo di Difesa Proletaria», which carried the quotation from Marx: «L'emancipazione dei lavoratori sarà opera

dei lavoratori stessi» (The emancipation of the workers will be the work of the workers themselves). *La Comune*'s May Day issue of 1911, after the usual review of origins and early triumphs, accused Samuel Gompers of having eviscerated May Day in the United States by having the first Monday in September officially declared Labor Day. As a consequence, May I passed unobserved by native Americans, although things were not much better in Europe, where it was an occasion for merrymaking. From Heverhill, Massachusetts, A. Cipriani wrote that the fierce repression in Italy had driven the «best subversives» into exile, accounting for the degeneration of Primo Maggio there. «For us,» he added, «I Maggio strengthens our implacable hatred and desire for vendetta against our oppressors». His animus was shared by Angiolina Algeri of Belair, Ohio, who denied that Primo Maggio was the Pasqua dei lavoratori. That day would arrive only when the workers rose and destroyed their oppressors. Complaining that the May Day drivel flowing from the pens of subversives had become tiresome, G. Bernardis demanded «Fatti e non chiacchiere» (Deeds and not idle chatter). The first duty of a revolutionary was to be skilled in the use of arms and dynamite; he proposed comrades meet, not to hear speeches or drink, but to form clubs of sharpshooters [58].

In 1912 and 1913, *La Comune* perceived in the IWW-led strikes in Lawrence, Paterson, and elsewhere, evidence of the intensification of the class struggle. The working masses, temporarily demoralized and deluded by the ignis fatuus of universal suffrage, were recovering their faith in the revolution. Amedeo Ciabattoni of Trenton, New Jersey, hailed Primo Maggio as the day of revolt of the *senza patria* and the *senza pane* (without country and without bread) against the bourgeoisie. But why had this long- awaited day of liberation not yet arrived? Because, he answered, religious and patriotic obscurantism still weighed heavily on the minds of our fathers, mothers, sisters, and all of us workers. In a letter from Modena, Edmondo Rossoni, who soon was to play an important part in the syndicalist movement in the United States, declared that he detested the rhetoric of the subversive movement and thus had no words for Primo Maggio. What was needed was «Il fatto, il fatto, il fatto» (The deed, the deed, the deed). Rossoni was articulating the state of mind of many who believed that the time for talk was over; it was time to act [59]. The revolutionary movement appeared to be moving toward a climax; then came the war.

To ask what if there had not been a war appears to be idle speculation. Yet there were «might-have-beens» to which the war put a period. It is important to appreciate this in order to enter into the minds of the prewar generation; they could conceive of things which have since been inconceivable. One of these beliefs was at the very heart of May Day: the international solidarity of the working class. Upon this was deposited the faith in the capacity of the workers to destroy the capitalist system at a single stroke with the general strike. The war destroyed that faith for all but a few true believers. After August 1914, Primo Maggio would never again be what it had been before. The war provoked the anarchists to impotent rage, distrust, despair. Primo Maggio 1915, F. Greco cried, was a day of horror, and of blood, proletarian blood spilled by proletarians. «Primo Maggio, a feast of solidarity and fraternity! What irony this year! It is finished as a festa dei lavoratori» [60]. The war, the fruit of the politicians and «parlor revolutionaries», had been extended throughout the world in the interest of capitalism. G. Cusumano exhorted the workers to lay down their tools and their arms, to join together for peace, not war. He directed his appeal specifically to women:

> Mothers, wives, sisters of workers, descend into the streets and piazze with flowers of May on your breast and join your sons, husbands, and brothers around the flaming standard of the Workers' International [61].

Luigi Galleani responded to the war with rhetorical fury which intensified as the conflict continued and as the forces of repression closed in upon him. *Cronaca*'s May Day issue of 1915 reflected on the meaning of the war for the anarchist movement. Of what worth were the great demonstrations of working-class solidarity, if at a sign the social democrats could take up arms and machine-gun their brothers across the border? Primo Maggio had become a holiday like the others with traditions that were performed by force of habit. The workers who had followed the banners of saints and madonnas now marched with red flags behind socialist politicians. A new religion of the proletariat, replacing the old dogmas and ceremonies with new ones, was muddling the workers' brains. The task of the anarchists was to form strong individual consciences among the workers. In order to do so, revolutionary propaganda had to be conducted not just on May Day, but every day. Galleani concluded that the war provided

an opportunity for the proletariat to wage its own war against the State and capitalism [62].

«Maggio di passione, maggio orrendo d'aberrazione, maggio caino, maggio grifano» (May of passion, horrendous May of aberration, May of Cain, rapacious May), thus Galleani greeted May Day 1916 [63]. The revolution had been betrayed by the pharisees of socialism, and the harvest was one of blood and tears. The blind and brutalized slaves of capitalism flocked to the battlefront, building with their own flesh and blood an altar to the patria. Yet the day of vendetta would come when the blood of the usurpers would fertilize the crops of justice and liberty. But another year of slaughter passed and Galleani averred:

> Better to piously bury in forgetful oblivion the shining tradition of Primo Maggio if it can no longer entrust to the people the sacred task of vendetta which the martyrs of Chicago confided to the proletariat of the world some thirty years ago from the gallows of the republic [64].

For many years, Primo Maggio had been a day of revolt. Then came the serious, practical people who sought revolution according to the rules of doctrine, not in the uprising of the piazza, who denounced the hotheads, demoralized the mob. «We alone», Galleani asserted bitterly, could have avoided the war if the socialist party had not for a quarter century exerted every effort at reconciliation with the ruling class and sharing its power over the proletariat. It remained to the anarchists to «unleash the ragged ones and the expiating cyclones, redeeming with sacrifice these three decades of impotence and cowardice».

In his last salute to May Day while on American soil, Galleani wrote of «Maggio Scellerato» (Cruel May):

> Today, in the infinite devastation of the violated frontiers, with the ruins of every civil memory of beauty and greatness, the pile of bones of ten million cadavers dominates the most desolate scene, and most sinister rises in the livid skies the sanguinary May. In the monstrous carnage the faith agonizes; obtuse gladiators, the outcasts of a hundred countries, bound yesterday to a liberating vesper, as if struck by an insane furor of perdition, slaughter each other. Was the heroic dream of a common suffering and redemption thus inaccessible to the heart of

> the people? And all our life, the ardors of youthful exuberance, to hasten the glorious realization lived in vain?... Why persist? Why still believe in the insurrectional vocation, in the revolutionary potential of the prioletariat? [65].

Responding to the doubts and waverings of fainthearted followers, Galleani declared himself undaunted. He who saw in the condition of the proletariat yesterday the possibility of near revolution had even more cause for such a convinction today. The war had taught the workers that their lives and those of their families meant nothing in the eyes of the ruling class. And they had learned that the fortunes of throne and patria, of altar and stock exchange, were in their hands. Might they not learn that they could do without God or king and that the patria was theirs for the taking? The catastrophe, Galleani prophesied, would come, only the precipitating cause had not occurred, but it would come.

During and after the war, Galleani and his followers (among whom were Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti) were under constant scrutiny by federal intelligence agencies and subject to arrests, seizures, proscriptions, imprisonments, and deportations. Although the May 1919 issue was the last number of *Cronaca* to be published in the United States, Primo Maggio passed unnoticed. Galleani, himself deported in June of that year, spent the last years of his life in Fascist confinement.

L'Era Nuova was suppressed by federal authorities in 1917, its mailing privileges withdrawn, its offices raided, members of the group imprisoned and deported. Despite such persecutions, a May 19, 1917 issue appeared, but without references to Primo Maggio. Somehow the Paterson group was able to publish several issues of *Il Bollettino de l'Era Nuova* in 1919. The May Day issue featured a full-page illustration by Vera Nirvana of revolutionaries defending a barricade in a devastated city, accompanied by a poem, «La Barricata», of R. Provinciali, celebrating the courage of the defenders. An optimistic note was struck by «Il Bandito», who saw in the Russian revolution «Le prime gocce», the first drops, of the storms of social revolution which was sweeping across the world. «Nemo» raised the perennial question: Would Primo Maggio be a day of revolt or of merrymaking? What would the American proletariat do today? [66].

The answer was given in the next issue of *Il Bollettino*: May Day had seen the inauguration of *Il Terrore Bianco*, the White Terror in the United States. In many cities, soldiers, sailors and police had at-

tacked peaceful parades of workers, beating and jailing them [67]. Tresca's *Il Martello* also reported on «le provocazioni del Primo Maggio». Vigilante groups incited by «interested parties» broke up meetings and assaulted the participants on the grounds that they were Bolsheviks. Tresca warned that such exploitations of residual wartime violence placed republican institutions in peril [68]. In *La Guardia Rossa, Primo Maggio 1919*. Tresca asserted that the war had been a disaster for the bourgeoisie. Its slaves had realized that it was not their uniforms but their blood and lives which made them valuable and equal to their masters. Despite the war and reaction, the proletariat persisted in celebrating Primo Maggio as the day of world fraternity [69]. *Guardia Rossa, Primo Maggio 1920*, however, was not devoted to the red revolution, but to *Il Terrore Bianco in America*, containing account after account of lynchings of Blacks, mob violence against Wobblies, police brutality, and violations of civil liberties. Editor Tresca concluded: «The land of Jefferson and of Lincoln has but chains, prisons and torture for whosoever thinks, feels, aspires for a tomorrow of justice, of fraternity, of liberty» [70]. Here was no invocation of Primo Maggio as the Easter of the workers, as the coming of spring, or as the dawn of the social revolution. Rather it was the eclipse of Primo Maggio, and with it the heroic period of Italian anarchism in America had come to an end [71].

This is a study of what Italian anarchists in America said about May Day rather than what they did. It would be possible from the letters in these publications to reconstruct the pattern of observances of Primo Maggio, their extent and character. An impressionistic reading suggests that the celebrations were widespread, taking place in small towns and mining camps as well as in big cities, that they were festive occasions with picnics, dances, eating and drinking. There were also the mandatory speeches, the dramatic productions (Gori's *Primo Maggio* most often), the singing of revolutionary songs, and the wearing of red ties and carnations, The proceeds of these *feste* most often went to support the radical press, which was in a constant state of financial crisis. Thus even *Cronaca* which denounced such trivialization of Primo Maggio, advertised and profited from such gatherings. As invented traditions, these events with their associated rituals and symbols deserve analysis: What values and beliefs did they inculcate in the participants? What latent social functions did they

serve? How effective were they in countering the competing social traditions proffered by the nationalist-clerical elite? Such an analysis, however, is for another time.

Thinking, writing, and reading are also forms of behavior. The Italian anarchist press in America was an extensive enterprise which demanded time and energy not only of its editors, but from its many contributors, distributors, readers, and supporters. Lacking advertising revenue, it depended upon the slender resources of its worker audience. The special numbers and single issues devoted to Primo Maggio represent an extraordinary investment. These publications themselves were an invented tradition, adapted from Italy. They embodied the ideological and emotional energies which were mobilized annually for the commemoration of Primo Maggio.

What has strikingly emerged from this analysis is the intensely religious nature of the anarchist faith which was expressed in the Primo Maggio invocations. The salient themes of martyrdom, declension, redemption, and resurrection which run though these discourses were derived from antecedent Christian and pagan religions. The exegesis also provided the faithful with a history encompassing past, present, and future: a myth of heroic origins; and indictment of shameful retrogression; and a millennial vision of the world to come. It offered both continuity with the past and a bridge to utopia. Within this cosmic drama, the anarchist elect had the sacred mission of keeping alive the sparks of the revolutionary spirit and spreading these among the masses. Hence the sense of moral superiority of the avant-garde, who often referred to the workers in uncomplimentary terms as cowardly, conscienceless, and brutalized. In the anarchist eschatology, the climax would arrive as a paroxysm of violence and blood which would avenge past wrongs and purify the new world.

Did the American ambience make a difference or was Primo Maggio in the United States simply a pale reflection of the Italian original? Certainly there were many similarities; it could not have been otherwise, since the exponents of anarchism were veterans of the movement in Italy. Yet the American context must have affected the interior meanings if not the external form of the observances. The international character of the working class, for example, which was an abstraction in Italy, was a reality for the immigrants who worked with and lived beside Jews, Poles, Blacks, Germans, etc. Did such contacts engender a more cosmopolitan attitude among them or make them more ethnocentric? In the context of American pluralism, they

had not only a class identity as workers, but also an ethnic identity as Italians, or more commonly «Wops» and «Dagoes». Did their low-status foreigness contribute to their sense of emargination and make them more receptive to extreme forms of protest? How else to explain the depths of anger which appear to have been the motive force behind Italian anarchism in America?

Finally, it should be noted that the anarchists found themselves trapped in a contradiction from which they could not extricate themselves. Despite their repeated complaints that Primo Maggio no longer had any significance, they continued to observe it in some fashion year in and year out. Even their jeremiads against the perversion of Primo Maggio soon took the form of familiar homilies. Certain comrades were troubled by the references to «glorious traditions». Were not anarchists supposed to be against all that was old and conventional? Galleani himself, who contributed greatly to the explication of the anarchist credo, inveighed against the «new religion» that was replacing the old with new dogmas and new ceremonies. Because they rejected the past for the future, the anarchists were uncomfortable with tradition, even the invented tradition of Primo Maggio.

1 Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, paperback ed. Cambridge, at the University Press, 1984, 1-14, 263-307.

2 On the history of May Day see Philip S. Foner, *May Day: A Short History of the International Workers' Holiday 1886-1986*, New York, International Publishers, 1986; *Uniti sotto le rosse bandiere: storia e cultura del Primo Maggio 1886-1922*, Milan, Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, n.d.; Andrea Panaccione, ed., *Sappi che oggi è la tua festa... per la storia del 1 maggio*, Venice, Marsilio Editori, 1986.

3 John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America*, Bloomington, Indiana State University, 1985 is the most recent and succesful attempt at synthesis of the extensive literature on American immigration history.

4 Rudolph J. Vecoli, «The Italian Immigrants in the United States Labor Movement from 1880 to 1929», in Bruno Bezza, ed., *Gli Italiani fuori d'Italia. Gli emigrati Italiani nei movimenti operai dei paesi d'adozione 1880-1940*, Milan, Franco Angeli Editore, 1983, 257-306; idem, «Italian American Workers: 1880-1920: Padrone Slaves or Primitive Rebels?», in Silvano M. Tomasi, ed., *Prospectives in Italian Immigration and Ethnicitiy*, New York, Center of Migration Studies, 1977, 25-49; idem, «Pane e giustizia: breve storia del movimento operaio italiano in America», *Movimento operaio e socialista* (Genoa), 22 (1976), 153-67.

5 Alberto Argentieri, «America proletaria e politica», *Pagine Libere* (Lugano), 4 (April 1, 1910), 440. Argentieri described the Italian immigrants as «infected with

the sickness of societies of mutual aid which are born and reproduce themselves in a frightening fashion». See also Rudolph J. Vecoli, «Cult and Occult in Italian American Culture», in Randall M. Miller and Thomas D. Marzik, eds., *Immigrants and Religion in Urban America*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1977, 25-47.

6 Gustavo Tosti, «I lavoratori italiani e le "trade unions"», *Gli italiani negli Stati Uniti d'America*, New York, 1906, 79-81.

7 Giovanni Di Silvestro, *Note ed appunti sulle colonie italiane degli Stati Uniti del Nord*, Philadelphia, 1908; Rudolph J. Vecoli, «Prelates and Peasants: Italian Immigrants and the Catholic Church», *Journal of Social History*, 2 (Spring 1969), 217-68.

8 Tosti, «Lavoratori», 80; «Italiani a Nuova York», *La Questione Sociale*, Florence, August 26, 1888; *Avanti!*, Rome, November 4, 1902; *La Bandiera. Numero Unico*. Published by the Società Reduci delle Patrie Battaglie di New York, April 22, 1890.

9 *L'Asino*, Rome, October 22, 1905; September 22, 1907; Di Silvestro, *Note ed appunti*; Alberto Argentieri, «Il problema dell'emigrazione italiana. Per un movimento concorde fra le organizzazioni operaie italo-americane», *Pagine Libere*, 5 September 15, 1911, 263-69; *La Pasqua dei Lavoratori. Numero unico straordinaria dei Socialisti Anarchici di N.Y.*, May 1, 1898; Leonardo Bettini, *Bibliografia dell'anarchismo*, 2 vols. Florence, Crescita Politica Editrice, 1976, v. I, t. 2: 173.

10 *Almanacco Sovversivo 1906-1907*, Barre, Vt.: Biblioteca Circolo Studi Sociali; *1908 Almanacco della Rivoluzione*, Paterson, N.J.: Libreria Sociologica, 1907; *Il Canzoniere dei Ribelli*, Barre, Vt.: *Cronaca Sovversiva*, 1904; *Il Canzoniere dei Ribelli*, 8th ed., Paterson, N.J.: Libreria Sociologica, n.d.; Augusta Molinari, «I giornali delle comunità anarchiche italo-americane», *Movimento Operaio e Socialista*, 4 (1981), 117-30; Bruno Cartosio, «Italian Workers and their Press in the United States, 1900-1920», in *The Press of Labor Migrants in Europe and North America 1880s to 1930s*, Chirstiane Harzig and Dirk Hoerder, eds., Bremen: University of Bremen Newspaper Preservation Project, 1985; Oreste Fabrizi, «Circolo di cultura e casa del popolo di East Cambridge», *La Parola del Popolo*, 29, november/december 1978, 115-16; Vecoli, «Italian Immigrants», 277-79; Bettini, *Bibliografia dell'anarchismo*, «Appunti per una storia dell'anarchismo italiano negli Stati Uniti d'America», v. I, t. 2: 289-97.

11 *La Comune*, Philadelphia, May 1, 1911.

12 Robert D'Attilio, «Primo Maggio: Haymarket as Seen by Italian Anarchists in America», in Dave Roediger and Franklin Rosemont, eds., *Haymarket Scrapbook*, Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Co., 1986, 229-31. This brief, undocumented essay is the only attention the subject has hitherto received.

13 *La Lotta*, New York, May 1, 1909.

14 *L'Anarchico*, New York, Februry 1, 1888, April 14, 1888.

15 Paul Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984, 354, 409, 412; Roediger and Rosemont, eds., *Haymarket Scrapbook*.

16 Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*, one vol. ed., New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1934, 79-80.

17 Goldman, *Living My Life*, 101; «Merlino Francesco Saverio», in Franco Andreucci and Tommaso Detti, eds., *Il movimento operaio italiano. Dizionario biografico 1853-1943*, 5 vols. and index, Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1977, 3: 429-37 hereafter cited as *MOI/DB*; Pier Carlo Masini, *Storia degli anarchici italiani da Bakunin a Malatesta (1862-1892)*, Milan, Rizzoli Editore, 1969, 174-76, 257-58; Ronald Creagh, *Sacco e Vanzetti*, Paris: Édition la Découverte, 1984, 60-62. Chapter 6, «Les exiles au drapeau

noir », is an excellent brief history of the early years of Italian anarchism in the United States.

18 This poem, written in the *Carcere dei Domenicani* of Leghorn, is not the same as Gori's more popular « Il Primo Maggio », which was sung to a chorus from Verdi's *Nabucco*. Pietro Gori, *Scritti Scelti*, 2 vols. Cesena: Edizioni L'Antistato, 1968, 324-25.

19 Creagh, *Sacco e Vanzetti*, 63-64; Masini, *Storia degli anarchici italiani nell'epoca degli attentati*, Milan: Rizzoli Editore, 1981, 69-77: « Gori, Pietro », *MOI/DB*, 2: 522-33.

20 Barre, Vt.: Salvatore Pallavicini Editore, 1986. It is dedicated « To the Italian Comrades of North America », signed Pietro Gori, Kansas City, Mo., March 1986.

21 Maurizio Antonioli, « Pietro Gori e la breve stagione del cavaliere errante ». *Annali dell'Istituto di Storia*, Florence, 1985 3 1982-1984, 109-133.

22 George Carey, « The Vessel, the Deed, and the Idea: Anarchists in Paterson, 1895-1908 », *Antipode*, Worcester, Mass. 1979, 10/11: 46-58; idem, « *La Questione Sociale*, an Anarchist Newspaper in Paterson, N.J. (1895-1908) », in Lydio F. Tomasi, ed., *Italian Americans: New Perspectives in Italian Immigration and Ethnicity*, New York, Center of Migration Studies, 1985, 289-97.

23 *La Questione Sociale*, April 30, 1896; April 30, 1897. In the latter article, the anarchists were chided for being too preoccupied with theories and polemics when they should have been encouraging the proletariat to organize autonomous labor associations free of political control. In the April 30, 1898 issue, A. Ferretti urged the workers to abandon the factories and fields, but not for merrymaking; they should spend the day reading anarchist literature with their families.

24 *La Pasqua dei Lavoratori*, May 1, 1898; Bettini, *Bibliografia dell'anarchismo*, v. 1, t. 2: 172-73, reports that this was the first publication of the Italian anarchists in the United States commemorative of Primo Maggio; however, his assertion that previously the anniversary had been passed over in silence neglects the issues of *La Questione Sociale* cited above.

25 Carey, « The Vessel », 46-58; Masini, *Storia degli anarchici italiani nell'epoca degli attentati*, 130-32, 142-49; Arrigo Petacco, *L'anarchico che venne dall'America*, Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1969.

26 Creasgh, *Sacco e Vanzetti*, 64; « Ciancabilla, Giuseppe », *MOI/DB*, 2: 31-33; Ettore Zoccoli, *L'Anarchia — Gli agitatori — Le idee — I fatti* (Turin: Fratelli Bocco Editori, 1907), 414; *Primo Maggio Impressioni e Ricordi di Giuseppe Ciancabilla* (Milan: Biblioteca del *Grido della Folla*, 1906), 5-10; Ugo Fedeli, *Giuseppe Ciancabilla*, Imola, Editrice Galeati, 1965.

27 *La Questione Sociale*, May 1, 1899.

28 *L'Aurora*, April 27, 1901.

29 *L'Aurora*, June 1, 1901; *La Protesta Umana*, San Francisco, April 30, 1903.

30 *La Protesta Umana*, Chicago, February 1902.

31 *La Protesta Umana*, April 23, 30, May 7, 1903; April 30, 1904.

32 New York: Ruffo & Ciani, 1900. The publication was dedicated « To the Comrades of North America who were brothers to me during the struggle ». The copy in the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, is inscribed « Comrade M. Nettlau, G.C. West Hoboken, N.J. May 19, 1900 ».

33 In addition to being published in *Fiori di Maggio* (1900) and *Primo Maggio* (1906), the poem appeared in the radical press from time to time; see *Il Lavoratore Italiano*, Pittsburg, Kansas, April 26, 1906 and *Cronaca Sovversiva*, May 4, 1912 and May 3, 1913.

34 See note 26 above.

35 «Galleani, Luigi», *MOI/DB*, II: 418-24; Ugo Fedeli, *Luigi Galleani*, Cesena, Edizioni «L'Antistato», 1956; Masini, *Storia degli anarchici italiani nell'epoca degli attentati*, 132-37; «Galleani, Luigi», Casellario Politico Centrale, Archivio Centrale dello Stato (Rome), hereafter cited as CPC/ACS.

36 For exemple, *Cronaca Sovversiva*, April 30, 1904; April 29, 1905; May 1, 1909.

37 *Cronaca Sovversiva*, April 29, 1905; April 21, 1906; April 27, 1907; May 2, 1908. Antonio Cavalazzi, Galleani's longtime collaborator, contributed articles regularly which echoed his mentor's point of view.

38 *Cronaca Sovversiva*, April 29, May 13, 1911.

39 *Cronaca Sovversiva*, May 3, 1913. Galleani's piece (under the pseudonym «L'Eretico» closed with the cry of Michael Schwab, one of the Haymarket anarchists: «Abbiate cuore, schiavi, insorgete!» (Take heart, slaves, arise!).

40 *Cronaca Sovversiva*, May 2, 1914. An illustration depicted generals sitting on cannons pointed at a worker, in the background can be seen the heads of beasts wearing top hats, with factory smokestacks and warships in the distance. In the caption, the worker speaks: «I do not delude myself; this is your May of violence and blood, but I am not afraid. One day your mercenaries will turn against you. Then it will be our May celebrated on your grave: the May of the social revolution».

41 «Rocca Massimo», *MOI/DB*, 4: 365-68. This was Tancredi's real name; his sojourn in the United States was from 1908-1911. His biographer wrote of Tancredi, «He manifested a constant irrationalist and pretentious vien, and was not able to go beyond an exasperated verbalism».

42 *Novatore*, New York, April 16-May 1, 1911, 117-18.

43 *Novatore*, 119. This poem, under the title «Calendimaggio», is included in the volume of Giovannitti's collected verse, *Quando Canta il Gallo*, Chicago: E, Clemente & Sons, 1957, 267.

44 *La Questione Sociale*, April 28, May 5, 1900; April 27, May 4, 1901.

45 *La Questione Sociale*, April 26, 1902.

46 *La Questione Sociale*, April 25, 1903; May 1, 1904. On Esteve see Gary Mormino and George Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Yuor City: Italians and their Latin Neighbors in Tampa, 1885-1985*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987, 150-51.

47 *La Questione Sociale*, April 29, May 20, 1905; March 31, April 28, May 19, 1906; May 4, 1907. In the last issue cited, the editors noted that it had been their intention to publish a special number dedicated to Primo Maggio, but financial conditions of the newspaper were such that it had not even been possible to publish a regular issue the previous week.

48 *New York Times*, April 10, 1908. See also Robert I. Goldstein, «The Anarchist Scare of 1908: a Sign of Tensions in the Progressive Era», *American Studies*, 15, 1974, 55-78.

49 *L'Era Nuova*, Paterson, May 1, May 8, 1909; April 30, 1910.

50 *L'Era Nuova*, May 3, 10, 1913.

51 *L'Era Nuova*, May 2, 1914. «Souvarine» was the pseudonym of Giosué Imparato.

52 Paul Buhle, «Debsian Socialism and the "New" Immigrant Worker», in *Insights and Parallels*, William L. O'Neile ed. Minneapolis: Burgess Publishing Co., 1973, 249-77 ; Andrea Graziosi, «Common Laborers, Unskilled Workers: 1880-1915», *Labor History*, 22 Fall, 1981, 512-44; Paolo Carpignano, «Immigrazione e degrada-

zione», in *La formazione dell'operaio massa negli Usa, 1898-1922*, Gisela Bock, Paolo Carpignano, and Bruno Ramirez, eds., Milan, Feltrinelli Editore, 1976, 189-238.

53 «Tresca Carlo», *MOI/DB*, 5: 97-100; «Tresca Carlo», CPC/ACS.

54 *La Plebe*, Philadelphia, May 1, 1908.

55 *L'Avvenire*, Steubensville, Ohio, May 1, 1910.

56 *La Propaganda*, Chicago, May 2, 1908. This issue featured the portrait of Marx surrounded by other prominent figures in the socialist movement, including two women, Anna Kuliscioff and Ada Negri.

57 *La Lotta*, New York, May 1, 1909. Included also in this special eight-page issue were stories and poems submitted by readers.

58 *La Comune*, Philadelphia, May 1, 1911.

59 *La Comune*, May 1, 1912; May 1, 1913.

60 *L'Era Nuova*, May 2, 1915.

61 *L'Era Nuova*, April 29, 1916.

62 *Cronaca Sovversiva*, May 1, 1915.

63 *Cronaca Sovversiva*, April 29, 1916.

64 *Cronaca Sovversiva*, May 5, 1917.

65 *Cronaca Sovversiva*, April 13, 1918. The article was accompanied by an illustration: against a desolate setting of ruins, with black birds flying in a darkened sky, a naked old woman holds a dead girl in her arms while around her lie the bodies of the dead.

66 *Il Bollettino de l'Era Nuova*, May 1, 1919.

67 *Il Bollettino de l'Era Nuova*, May 10, 1919.

68 *Il Martello*, New York, May 10, 1919.

69 *La Guardia Rossa, Primo maggio 1919*, New York.

70 *Guardia Rossa, Primo Maggio 1920*, New York.

71 The history of Italian anarchism in the United States has yet to be written. However, a detailed chronology is in *Un trentennio di attività anarchica (1914-1945)*, Cesena: Edizioni «L'Antistato», 1953, «Parte seconda: Gli anarchici italiani negli Stati Uniti d'America», 119-76.